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# OME FRENCH POETS OF TO-DAY

A COMMENTARY WITH SPECIMENS

BY F. S. FLINT

THE POETRY BOOKSHOP · 35 DEVONSHIRE STREET  
THEOBALDS ROAD · LONDON, W.C.1.



## THE MONTHLY CHAPBOOK

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# SOME

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## MODERN FRENCH POETS

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### (A Commentary, with Specimens)

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By F. S. FLINT

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*Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, René Kerdyk, Paul  
Eluard, Henri Ghéon, Paul Aeschmann, François Porché,  
Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Jules Romains, André Spire,  
René Arcos, Pierre-Jean Jouve, Marcel Martinet, Emile  
Verhaeren, Henri de Régnier, Jean de Bosschère, Paul  
Fort, Paul Claudel.*

FIVE years have passed since I wrote my last *French Chronicle* for POETRY AND DRAMA, and the tall "bushy-topped" (there are two kinds of tree recognised by the Army, the "bushy-topped" and the "poplar")—"bushy-topped" poplar-tree in front of my window rustles in the light wind now as then. Nothing has happened; a slight displacement of matter, a few ether-waves which have been lost in space, a few sound-waves which have long since impinged on the silence that, at the limit of the atmosphere, opposes an infinite resistance to all our uproars and hullabaloes. Nothing in nature has changed; but a generation of men has been ham-strung, and the keystone of a civilisation perhaps shattered. What France has lost in youthful genius can never be computed. Of known writers, 275 had been killed and 28 were missing by March, 1917. It is impossible yet to say what effect the war has had on those who have survived. After the comparatively slight blood-letting and the defeat of 1870-71, came the strange dreaming, the breaking-away from traditions, the exoticism, the revolt of the *décadence* and of Symbolism. After the exhaustion and victory of 1914-18, what? If we had all the reviews, all the trench-journals and all the books of poems—since poetry is literature in its first impulse—published during the war and after it, we might begin to perceive the answer to this question. No single man,



however, possesses all this material, and the task of sifting it will almost accomplish itself, as time goes on and the inert matter falls away. There must be, too, some good, original work which is not yet published; and until this is available, no complete review can be made.

I have, however, a score or more of books, none of them quite negligible, and a few poems gathered from reviews and trench journals, which seem to give a roughly approximate idea of the poetry produced in France during the past five years. War verse which is mere foaming at the mouth, or worse, expectoration, or tedious rhetoric and eloquence, or simply silly declamation, I do not touch. The curious will find all they may want of this in a volume called *Les Poètes de la Guerre*,\* which was renamed by the *Mercure de France*, *Les plus mauvais vers de la guerre*.

The French soldier despised the heroics and the flowery language of civilians. There is a passage in *Le Feu* by M. Henri Barbusse, in which a soldier returned from leave tells his comrades with disgust how "ceux de l'arrière" call the bayonet "Rosalie." But this poem by M. Frédéric Lefèvre, which appeared in *La Presqu'Île* for April, 1918, was composed, read and applauded in the trenches:

Et puis un jour viendra,  
Ce sera un matin de printemps  
Ou un soir d'été,  
Et ce sera la Paix !  
Et rien ne distinguera  
Ce matin  
ou ce soir,  
Ce jour,  
Des autres matins ou des autres soirs,  
Des autres jours pareils,  
Mais ce sera la Paix !  
Et il y aura si radieuse joie,  
Flambant de l'âme aux yeux  
Des jeunes filles de France  
Et du monde, hélas !  
Du pauvre monde ensanglanté,  
Il y aura tant de bonheur muet  
Dans le cœur atterré et incrédule  
Des vrais hommes d'aujourd'hui  
Que ce sera vraiment la Paix,

---

\* Published by Berger-Levrault.



C'est-à-dire un jour qui aura commencé  
Comme les autres

Mais,

Soir ou matin,  
En vérité, en vérité je vous le dis,  
Quelques heures avant la tranchée nouvelle,  
Ce sera le jour de la Paix.

Ce jour-là, dit Maurice Barrès,  
Les poilus triomphants passeront sous l'Arc-de-Triomphe,  
Mais nous savons bien  
Que ce jour-là, les poilus,  
Ils seront les poilus,  
Et que les pauvres vrais poilus que nous sommes,  
Tout fiévreux de n'être plus poilus,  
Courront en hâte vers le Gy de leur coeur,  
Arc triomphal que nul autre n'égale  
Et sous lequel, vraiment, ils entreront  
En Vainqueurs !

In the misery of the front line, that poem probably rendered the feelings of everybody, although there is no doubt that the same soldiers, in the spirit of the day, would have marched proudly beneath the Arc de Triomphe. But while face to face with the ghastly business of war, they resented all vicarious pomposity on their behalf, just as much as they despised the gentlemen who managed to wriggle into safe jobs, the *embusqués*, to whom this ballad from *Le Poilu*, *journal des Tranchées*, "le seul irrégulier du front qui n'ait pas de collaborateurs académiciens" is addressed :

#### BALLADE DES EMBUSQUES

Déambulant, rieur, badin,  
Élégant jusqu'à l'impudence,  
Il étale, ce muscadin,  
Sa martiale outrecuidance.  
Verbeux, tranchant, plein d'arrogance,  
Il se prend pour un paladin.  
—Salut à toi, embuscadin,  
Au flanc, premier tireur de France.

Celui-ci, d'esprit anodin,  
A moins d'allure et de prestance,  
Et, satisfait d'être gandin,  
Vit, en dormant, son existence.

—En attendant la délivrance  
Fais tes ongles, pâle blondin !  
Et dors tranquille, embuscadin :  
Les Poilus gardent notre France.

Pitié pour toi, pauvre Dandin !  
Quelque malpropre manigance  
A fait de toi ce baladin  
Peureux, terré sans élégance.  
Disserte, flirte et conférence  
A l'ombre d'un vertugadin.  
—Amuse-toi, embuscadin !  
Tant d'autres peinent pour la France.

#### ENVOI :

Inconnu qui, avec instance,  
Crois cette pierre en ton jardin,  
Ramasse-la, embuscadin,  
—Et gloire à nos Poilus de France.

The *poilu* could be sad, gay, satirical or healthily libertine, according to his mood. His situation compelled truthfulness. He had no love for the epic note of the war-correspondents. There is a drab heroism behind the irony of the following ballad from another trench journal, *L'Echo des Guitounes*, "économique, intermittent et gratuit; Direction : face aux Boches" :

#### BALLADE A LA BOUE

Deux mois il a plu ; froide et noire,  
La tranchée est, bourbeux fossé,  
Gluant cloaque, un Purgatoire  
Où vivants nous aurions glissé.  
Pourtant, redresse-toi, chemine,  
Soldat que l'hiver a transi—  
Fièrement sous l'averse fine :  
La boue est un honneur aussi.

Plus de chants hurlant la victoire ;  
Mais, si l'orgueil s'est effacé,  
Le coeur n'a pas cessé de croire  
Sous l'uniforme élaboussé.  
Aussi, comme on a haute mine  
Quand, sur les bords du drap roussi,



L'ordure se plaque, autre hermine  
La boue est un honneur aussi.

Amis, peut-être un jour l'Histoire  
Dira qu'où nous avons passé  
On taillait nos linceuls de gloire  
Dans la fange d'un sol glacé.  
Mais voyez . . . la nuit s'illumine ;  
Sous l'obus, la terre a jailli.  
Des croix? J'en ai plein la poitrine,  
La boue est un honneur aussi.

#### ENVOI

Prince, à Dieu seul tout se termine,  
Si nous devons mourir ici,  
Pour nous la mort sera divine :  
La boue est un honneur aussi.

Sergent F. ICHON  
Tranchées de Vendresse.

With these syllables ringing in one's ears, verses like M. Jean Aicard's :

A cette heure où la Mort a seule la parole  
Tout prend une grandeur suprême de symbole

are an impertinence.

It is curious that, under arms, simple men who had never given a thought to literature took to writing verse. The poet, Henri Dérieux, found a workman under his command whom the war had made a poet. His subjects were the things that concerned him immediately, incidents of military life, thoughts of his absent family, and, although his verses were awkward and inelegant, they had the clarity and simplicity which is the charm of M. Francis Jammes' work. This is how he describes his village :

. . . la mairie où sont entassées les archives du pays,  
Ensuite l'église, lieu sacré, maison de Jésus-Christ,  
Près de là l'école où les enfants de X. . . .  
Apprennent à aimer la Patrie qu' ils serviront un jour.  
La maison à l'angle de la rue sert d'infirmerie . . .

—*Mercur de France*, 16. ii, 1916.

M. GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE found several poets in his battery, a shop-

assistant, a weaver, a clerk in an ironmongery stores. Their verses, he said, had that natural tone which is much the most agreeable thing in poetry. He quotes a poem by Driver Alexandre Coulon, a weaver of Saint-Quentin :

Dans le bois de C. . . . ois  
Nous y avons vécu huit mois,  
Planté de frênes, de bouleaux, de sapins verts,  
La . . . batterie du . . . y a passé l'hiver.  
Les bicoques en bois et couvertes de roseaux  
Je vous assure que les poilus n'ont pas eu chaud  
Puis avec le printemps les beaux jours sont venus  
J'y ai vu la V. . . . en crue  
Et sur les berges inondées  
Je pêchais le gardon le brochet  
De l'eau jusqu'au mollet et transi par le froid.  
De retour au gourbi les poilus de la pièce se moquaient de moi.  
Les jours et les mois s'écoulaient  
Et des nouvelles jamais  
Pendant bien des nuits dans mes rêveries  
Je songeais à mon épouse chérie  
Qui est sous le joug des assassins de Liège et de Louvain  
Qui peut-être pleure du soir au matin  
Puis un jour dans ce bois où l'eau est hébergée  
J'ai reçu des nouvelles de l'aimée  
C'est par une expatriée une amie inconnue  
Vous ne pourriez croire le bonheur que j'ai eu  
Toujours je penserai à ma bienfaitrice  
C'est une institutrice  
Demeurant à Saint-Quentin  
Rue des Girondins . . .

—*Mercure de France*, i. xi, 1915.

And so he continues, describing, as M. Apollinaire says, "in a striking fashion the life of an artillery-driver in the fighting-line."

One could perhaps find here the argument that, given leisure, men turn to some form of art for distraction. Quite a number of French poets beguiled the tedium of military life by writing rhyming epistles to one another. In March, 1916, *Le Double Bouquet* published two such epistles which had passed between M. Léo Languier and Guillaume Apollinaire :

" Mon cher Guillaume Apollinaire, Brigadier,  
Je reçois votre épître, et le divin laurier



Que j'oubliais, le noir laurier des vieux lyriques,  
 L'arbre des bois sacrés et des fêtes orphiques,  
 Invisible et réel frémit derrière moi,  
 Et je retrouve un peu du poétique émoi  
 Que jusques à présent a tenu vingt années  
 De mon âge au labeur des Muses inclinées.  
 Apprenez tout d'abord que je trace ces vers  
 Non pas sous le soleil des "Orients déserts,"  
 Mais par un bleu matin de France et de dimanche,  
 Sous un lilas qui n'est rien qu'une averse blanche  
 De grappes, car les fleurs des jardins et des prés  
 Poussent, malgré la guerre et la mitraille, auprès  
 Des canons, dont la toux lugubre me réveille.  
 L'aube est évidemment et classique et vermeille.  
 J'ai dormi comme vous au milieu des soldats  
 Roulé dans mon manteau troué, n'entendant pas  
 Les coups de feu perdus et les marmites boches.  
 (De rime à ce mot-là je ne connais que *moches*.)  
 Et maintenant, il est dimanche éperdument,  
 Et le jour monte, clair, dans un frémissement,  
 La nuit trouble semblait une embuscade noire,  
 Mais le matin triomphe ainsi qu'une victoire.  
 Je ne sais rien, sinon qu'à cent mètres, là-bas,  
 Otto, Fritz ou Muller ne me rateraient pas,  
 Si je voulais aller parmi les betteraves  
 Rêver . . . Et je les vois, appliqués, laids et graves.  
 Ils ont commenté Faust dans le vieil Heidelberg,  
 Leur père a vu passer Richard Wagner . . . Guillaume  
 Apollinaire, on dit que le peuple de Rome  
 Suit un poète et marche en levant son drapeau.  
 Je ne sais rien . . .

Le Général de Castelnau

Passe, un crêpe à son bras, dans son automobile,  
 Moustache blanche, œil clair et visage tranquille  
 Sous la couronne d'or de son képi . . .

Voilà,

Vive la France, brigadier, qui nous veut là !

To which Apollinaire replied :

Léo Languier :

Soldat mystique,

O brancardier !

Les vers du caporal plaisent au brigadier . . .

Ce secteur 114, est-ce Arras ou peut-être

La ferme Choléra sinon le bois Le Prêtre?  
 Ici la fraise est rouge et les lilas sont morts,  
 La couleuvre se love en la paille où je dors  
 Quand s'éveille la nuit la Champagne Tonnante,  
 La nuit quand les convois traînent leur rumeur lente  
 A travers la Champagne où tonnent nos canons  
 Et les flacons ambrés . . .

Et si nous revenons,

Dieu ! que de souvenirs !

Je suis gai pas malade,  
 Et comme fut Ronsard : le chef d'une brigade.  
 Agent de liaison, je suis bien aguerri.  
 J'ai l'air mâle et fier, j'ai même un peu maigri . . .  
 Etes-vous en Argonne, ou dans le Labyrinthe?  
 Moi, je ne suis pas loin de Reims, la ville sainte,  
 Je vis dans un marais, au fond d'un bois touffu,  
 Ma hutte est en roseaux et ma table est un fût  
 Que j'ai trouvé naguère au bord du Bras-de-Vesle.  
 Le rossignol garrule et l'Amour renouvelle  
 Cependant que l'obus rapace en miaulant  
 Abat le sapin noir ou le bouleau si blanc.  
 Mais quand reverrons-nous une femme, une chambre?  
 Quand nous reverrons-nous ? Mais, sera-ce en septembre ? . . .  
 Adieu Léo Larguier !

Ça barde en ce moment . . .

105 et 305 . . . le beau bombardement ! . . .

Je songe au mois de mars, à vous, à la tour Magne . . .

(Où est mon chocolat ? . . . Les rats ont tout croqué ! . . .)

Et j'ajoute, mon cher, style *communiqué* :

"Duel d'artillerie, à minuit, en Champagne . . ."

Guillaume Apollinaire died of influenza two days before the signing of the Armistice. His resistance had been weakened by a shell-wound in the head. Apollinaire was a man of many interests, with a mind attracted by the intellectually complex and by the humanly simple. He wrote a treatise on cubist art, and he admired the naïve poetry, quoted above, of the men of his battery. An untiring collector of anecdotes of all kinds—an anecdote is a morsel of life cut fresh—he contributed his finds to the *Mercure de France* under the heading, *La Vie Anecdotique*. His joviality made him a popular man among soldiers. The bulk of Apollinaire's poems are in the two volumes, *Alcools* and *Calligrammes, poèmes de la Paix et de la Guerre* (1913-1916). There are many eccentricities in the latter volume, the least



of them being the absence of punctuation; but words arranged in the form of pipes, trees, cravats and in complicated designs, and rain trickling down the page in single letters were amusements that kept Apollinaire's mind alert. He was an adventurer of the mind, but a fine poet always when the right mood came. The man and the poet both appear in *La Jolie Rousse*, from *Calligrammes* :

Me voici devant tous un homme plein de sens  
Connaissant la vie et de la mort ce qu'un vivant peut connaître  
Ayant éprouvé les douleurs et les joies de l'amour  
Ayant su quelquefois imposer ses idées  
Connaissant plusieurs langages  
Ayant pas mal voyagé  
Ayant vu la guerre dans l'Artillerie et l'Infanterie  
Ayant perdu ses meilleurs amis dans l'effroyable lutte  
Blessé à la tête trépané sous le chloroforme  
Je sais d'ancien et de nouveau autant qu'un homme seul pourrait  
des deux savoir  
Et sans m'inquiéter aujourd'hui de cette guerre  
Entre nous et pour nous mes amis  
Je juge cette longue querelle de la tradition et de l'invention  
De l'Ordre et de l'Aventure

Vous dont la bouche est faite à l'image de celle de Dieu  
Bouche qui est l'ordre même  
Soyez indulgents quand vous nous comparez  
A ceux qui furent la perfection de l'ordre  
Nous qui quêtions partout l'aventure  
Nous ne sommes pas vos ennemis  
Nous voulons vous donner de vastes et d'étranges domaines  
Où le mystère en fleurs s'offre à qui veut le cueillir  
Il y a là des feux nouveaux des couleurs jamais vues  
Mille phantasmes impondérables  
Auxquels il faut donner de la réalité  
Nous voulons explorer la bonté contrée énorme où tout se tait  
Il y a aussi le temps qu'on peut chasser ou faire revenir  
Pitié pour nous qui combattons toujours aux frontières  
De l'illimité et de l'avenir  
Pitié pour nos erreurs pitié pour nos péchés

Voici que vient l'été la saison violente  
Et ma jeunesse est morte ainsi que le printemps  
O Soleil c'est le temps de la Raison ardente  
Et j'attends  
Pour la suivre toujours la forme noble et douce

Qu'elle prend afin que je l'aime seulement  
 Elle vient et m'attire ainsi qu'un fer l'aimant  
     Elle a l'aspect charmant  
     D'une adorable rousse  
 Ses cheveux sont d'or on dirait  
 Un bel éclair qui durerait  
 Ou ces flammes qui se pavanent  
 Dans les roses-thé qui se fanent

Mais riez riez de moi  
 Hommes de partout surtout gens d'ici  
 Car il y a tant de choses que je n'ose vous dire  
 Tant de choses que vous ne me laisseriez pas dire  
 Ayez pitié de moi

The same spirit of adventure, a little more boisterous, a little less poetic, is to be found in M. JEAN COCTEAU's *Cap de Bonne Espérance*. It is difficult to know why he gave that name to his book, unless it is because the poems in it are steps in the author's game of finding himself, and that he fancies that with them he has rounded the Cape of Good Hope of his own talent. "*Le Cap*," he says, "was begun early in 1915 and finished at the beginning of 1917. It is the poem of weight. The mind becomes elated, wanders into space. Youth thinks it has a grip on certainties. The aeroplane climbs. But the earth holds men with all its force. The airman comes down and the poem returns to what is human." The poem, in fact, is a collection of images placed one against the other, with few of the ordinary connecting links of speech, it being left to the reader to form the fusion in his mind. If the fusion takes place, you have the sensation of poetry; if not, you are bewildered. The subject is flying, the hero, Roland Garros. The text jumps about over the page. "The margin does not frame the text; it is distributed over the page." In this way :

un déclic

l'hélice une pale puis  
     l'autre puis  
         les pales  
  
     on voit les  
         pales



ou flambe  
une loterie d'azur

le moteur        se        tait

l'aéroplane  
plonge à pic

dans le vide

sans aide        un plongeon antique  
à quatre mille de la terre

le goéland ichtyophage  
se laisse choir  
de tout son bec  
sur sa proie  
profonde

On another page occurs this passage, the only one of its kind, it should be said :

éo	ié	iu	ié	
é	é	ié	io	ié
ui	ui	io	ié	
aéoé		iaoé		
a u i a		ou		a o é
io io		io iu		
aéiouiu				
iuiaé		ui ui		io ué
o é o				
a é o é				
oé aé iéoa				
iéiaoa		iéua		iéua
oa oa iéua				
ié ié é é				
	é			
				oute

A very comprehensive American college yell, or the influence of M.

Marinetti on French poetry. It reminds me of a poem by M. Pierre Albert-Birot in *Sic* (sons, idées, couleurs) for November, 1918:

## Poème à crier et à danser

## L'AVION

vrroN (1) — on — on — on — on — on

Vrrr                      Vrrr                      Vrrr

# hihihi

## Quououitt

ouououitt

ouououitt

terra

trra

terra

trrra

trrratrrra

trrratrrra

hahahahahahahahahahahahahahah

viii

VITT

(2) oua oua oua oua oua oua oua oua oua oua oua oua

(2) 

ouououitt

ouououitt

ouououitt

vrr

vii

(2) |||||

(1) Prolonger le son.

(2) Mettre la main en sôupape sur la bouche.

But M. Cocteau is a more serious artist; he is a poet who, as he seems to suggest himself, is in the difficult period when the voice breaks. His *Cap* should be read with his two other books of this period, *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*, notes on music and the ballet, and *Le Potomak*, a kind of Russian ballet in prose, with two albums of amusing drawings.

The difference between the feverish actuality of M. Cocteau's *Cap* and the sensuous passion of M. RENE KERDYK's *Les Oiseaux tristes*, is as great as the difference between a ride in a crowded tube train and a walk along a country lane in summer. Yet M. Kerdyk's life has not been without excitement, for *Les Oiseaux tristes*, I am informed, were composed in the trenches. How little of this transpires from the poems may be gathered from an example typical of the whole :

La solitude est mon amante, ô  
Si bonne et à retrouver si douce,  
Experte à jeter sur moi la housse  
Tendre du silence, et le manteau



Tout envoûté d'Elle, et sa minceur . . .  
Mon Dieu, de cette amie, au moins d'elle  
Ne me privez pas, car elle excelle  
A me parler de l'autre, sa soeur,

Avec tant de caresses d'âme et  
Des mots de mystère si sensibles,  
Que me torture moins l'impossible  
Echange des baisers parfumés . . .

Where M. Cocteau would have been inventing rhythms and images to describe the aeroplanes overhead, M. Kerdyk was probably absorbed in the search for rhymes like *amante, ô-manteau, âme et-parfumés*, an extraordinary detachment of mind, which he carries all through the book. *Les Oiseaux tristes* reveals rather than tells the heat and cooling of a love affair, recollected at a distance and dwelt on tenderly. It is expressed with considerable artistry of phrase and rhythm, the words leaning lingeringly on the emotion behind them. But to be able to find their lucid sensuousness, to evoke the scenes—garden, hill, and chamber—and the changes of mood of a far-off passion in such a situation, is extraordinary. At least one French poet at war was able to escape from his environment.

M. PAUL ELUARD was not so lucky. The short poems in his plaque, *Le Devoir et l'Inquiétude*, seem to have been conceived in a state of mind bordering on hallucination, produced by the tension of active service:

Et que le feu me brûle !  
Il est toujours si loin  
Que le plus court chemin  
Me montre ridicule  
Aux rêveurs du chemin.

Dites la chose affreuse :  
Toutes les mains sont froides  
Et la nuit nous font mal  
Car la terre on la creuse  
Avec une hâte affreuse  
La nuit et avec tant de mal !

Oh ! toute cette vie,  
Tout près de moi, le feu qui brûle . . .  
Dites? serais-je ridicule?  
Oh ! vous tous, transis, hardis,  
Je vous le dis : Notre vie brûle !

But his broadsheet of *Poèmes pour la Paix* shows the revulsion brought about by the peace, simple things appearing to be the most wonderful in the world :

I.

Toutes les femmes heureuses ont  
Retrouvé leur mari—il revient du soleil  
Tant il apporte de chaleur.  
Il rit et dit bonjour tout doucement  
Avant d'embrasser sa merveille.

XI.

Toute la fleur des fruits éclaire mon jardin,  
Les arbres de beauté et les arbres fruitiers.  
Et je travaille et je suis seul en mon jardin.  
Et le Soleil brûle en feu sombre sur mes mains.

I now approach a group of poets, who, although their work shows a widely divergent attitude towards the war, would, if set round a table to discuss all its moral implications, almost certainly come to some sort of agreement, in which their extreme differences would disappear. How far apart they are now may be judged from the fact that to one of them, M. Henri Ghéon, M. Romain Roland is a traitor, while to at least three of the remainder, MM. P.-J. Jouve, René Arcos, and Marcel Martinet, he is an apostle of humanity. M. Ghéon calls his "poèmes du temps de Guerre," *Foi en la France*; M. Jouve, *Vous êtes des Hommes, Poème devant le Grand Crime, Danse des Morts*; M. Arcos, *Le Sang des Autres*; M. Martinet, *Les Temps maudits*. The truth is with M. Ghéon, if you look at France as a whole, as a nation; it is with MM. Jouve, Arcos, and Martinet, if you look at the men composing the nation. M. Ghéon accepts France "toute entière avec tes défauts." M. Jouve sees criminals, who, to serve their own ends, plunged the world into war, and unheeding men, who allowed themselves to be driven like sheep to the slaughter. M. Ghéon is racially right and doctrinally wrong. M. Jouve and his friends are racially wrong and doctrinally right. The world will adjust itself between them.

M. HENRI GHEON will be remembered as the author of *Algérie* and other books of poems, of two plays in *vers libre*, *Le Pain*, and *L'Eau de Vie*, and of a book of criticism, *Nos Directions*, which is full of ingenious remarks and definitions. M. Ghéon during the years pre-



ceding the war seems to have neglected poetry for criticism. Called up to serve in the 29th Artillery, and solicited by so many new emotions, he had some difficulty at first in regaining command of the skilful metric of his plays and poems, and almost he made a virtue of it :

Quand la mort menace et quand le temps presse,  
les plus simples mots reprennent un sens  
et les plus pauvres rythmes un accent :  
ah ! pour l'instant, il ne s'agit pas de bien dire !

Of course, *il s'agit toujours de bien dire*, and most of the poems in *Foi en la France* are excellently well said. M. Ghéon is at his best when his emotions are strongly stirred, at his worst when he gives play to his reason, a singular reversal for so well-informed a critic, but a normal state for a poet. *Foi en la France* is the prelude to another book of poems in preparation, to be called *Foi en Dieu*. The progress of M. Ghéon's conversion may be traced in the first book; and he is not alone in his conversion. The poem that appeals most to me is *Le Dernier " Cahier " de Péguy* :

Comme tu marchais à la guerre dans tes cahiers d'avant la guerre,  
petit troupier !  
ah ! comme tu marchais à cette guerre !  
comme elle était ta chose, et ta route, et ton cri  
et le martèlement de ton inlassable outil sur l'enclume,  
et la cadence de ton pas dans les marches et contremarches  
des bataillons de mots français que tu menais suivant une dialectique  
rusée,  
(une dialectique, dirais-tu, qui est une tactique et une stratégie)  
à l'assaut des mauvaises pensées de l'ennemi !  
comme tâtant, biaisant et fonçant droit ensuite,  
ah ! comme tu emportais le morceau ! . . .

je cherche en vain celui qui te remplacera, maître d'école ! . . .

Aujourd'hui n'est pas consommé, tant s'en faut, ni ton oeuvre, ni la  
victoire . . .  
(décidé, non point consommé, dirais-tu)  
ni ta vie, ni ta peine encore, vaillant petit homme de troupe,  
bien que ton corps ait rendu l'âme et semble en avoir fini avec nous . .

This instinctive faith in France, the natural love for a country generous in life and ideas :

Vieille terre de France, patrie des paysans et des ouvriers  
aux idées claires, des purs artistes et des tendres femmes,  
terre généreuse des houbions et des blés, des vignes et  
des oliviers, terre où l'homme a le travail si gai, sifflant  
sur l'échelle, chantant à l'établi . . .

(to quote from *Le Mal*, M. Arcos's book of war pictures), a country  
richly endowed with historical and artistic traditions, embodied in  
ancient and beautiful towns :

. . . cette rivière  
de diamants royaux, Paris, Nemours, Versailles,  
et glissant sur le fil azuré de la Loire,  
Blois, Luynes, Chaumont, Plessis-les-Tours, Ambroise,  
comme pour un triomphe . . .

(to quote from M. PAUL AESCHIMANN's *Le Coureur d'Azur*), is a very  
human and taking sentiment, and one for which men will fight before  
they will fight for an idea. But M. Aeschimann, who is apparently  
of foreign extraction, had another, a young man's, reason for taking  
up arms :

Ainsi que la novice entre en religion  
je me suis engagé pour la sainte patrie  
du Louvre et de Ronsard, des églises fleuries,  
du fin parler divin qui surpasse en douceur  
la plainte d'Antigone et monte par mon coeur  
dans mon sang, tout instinct avant que de s'inscrire  
ô Muse sur la page où tu viens me sourire.

J'ai voulu mériter la race délicate  
et fière dont tu sors, en ta blancheur d'agate,  
ô ma femme affinée et pensive, jaillie  
des générations ardentes et polies,  
dont le goût sûr, l'esprit agile et l'âme artiste,  
dans ton rayonnement de vivante persistent. . . .

Et j'ai pris le fusil, j'ai quitté mon bonheur sans entendre  
assez pour différer, le reproche de sa voix tendre. . . .

*Le Coureur d'Azur* is the work of a young man, full of the ardours  
and enthusiasms, the warmly coloured impressions of youth, and just  
as an adult person, while admiring the healthy colour, the bright eyes  
and the lithe, quick motions of a child at play in a summer garden,  
will shrink a little from the heat of its body if it should come too near,

so one feels a slight shrinking from the youthful heat of M. Aeschmann's poetry, although admiring the grace of his experiences. But he would bring to the argument round my fancied table the enthusiasm of his memories of Latin Europe :

France, Italie, ô mes sœurs pavanées  
sur le lit d'argent bleu des Méditerranées,  
ô désirables corps, jumelles Danaés  
qui dans vos flancs couleur de rose tourangelle  
très délicatement veinés  
du violet des collines toscanes  
absorbiez la semence vermeille  
dans la paix des printemps de naguère et tendiez  
si généreusement vers l'Allemagne  
des seins lourds d'un suc au millier  
de saveurs qui délivrent. . . .

M. FRANÇOIS PORCHE, the author of *L'Arrêt sur la Marne* and *Le Poème de la Tranchée*, would represent a graver France, in whom the traditions of the race have sunk so deeply as to have reduced it to silence, whence from time to time emerge men like Péguy to give voice to its accumulated treasure of experience. According to M. Porché :

D'esprit plus lent, de peau plus dure,  
Par le soleil et la froidure  
Hâlés, gercés, et lourds de pas,  
Ceux que voilà ne chantent pas.

Ils se souviennent qu'au village  
Le tocsin un soir a sonné.  
Avant qu'un premier attelage  
N'ait rentré le blé moissonné.

Trois fois, comme ils lisaient un acte  
Lorsqu'ils devaient le revêtir  
De leur signature compacte,  
Ils ont lu l'ordre de partir.

Ayant compris, nul ne sourcille.  
Chacun a rangé sa faucille,  
Mais tous, ce soir-là, sous les draps,  
Ont pris leurs femmes dans leurs bras.

A l'aube, ils ont fait à l'étable  
Un long dernier tour en sabots,



Compté des écus sur la table,  
Puis, lavés, rasés, brossés, beaux,

Tous, paysans de pleurs avarés,  
Par les mêmes sentiers herbeux  
Où naguère ils menaient leurs boeufs,  
Ils s'en sont allés vers les gares.

These racially admirable men and all those others whom M. Porché enumerates in the section called *La Bataille of L'Arrêt*, stopped the German rush at the Marne with a stubbornness of courage and a ferocity of attack that took their enemies—convinced that France was degenerate—with a surprise which, it is to be feared, their present dejection will cause them to forget. The Marne, as M. Edmond Pilon points out in his interesting book, *Sous l'Egide de la Marne, histoire d'une rivière*, is almost the tutelary river of France. It witnessed the defeat of the Huns in the fifth century on the Catalaunian fields, and the modern Germans twice found disaster there, in 1914 and 1918. Its historical, literary, and artistic associations are probably more numerous than those of any other French river. M. Porché's poem, *L'Arrêt*, describes the descent of the Germans on to its plains, Paris during the first days, the French mobilisation, and the battle. He writes with a sobriety of diction which might be taken as a model by the innumerable band of versifiers who have already tried, and who will in future no doubt take up the same subject. This absence of frenzied language marks also *Le Poème de la Tranchée*. Both poems are conceived with a quiet intensity which makes them much more effective than any grandiloquent epicism short of sheer genius. M. Porché avoids monotony by varying his metres to suit the episodes of his poems, sometimes using a *vers libre* like La Fontaine's, sometimes writing in verses of six, eight, ten, or twelve syllables, and so on. His contribution to the debate would be the racial necessity of the battle, Europe being what she was and what she has been.

M. PIERRE DRIEU LA ROCHELLE, author of *Interrogation* would come prepared with a question, supported by a whole sheaf of considerations: Does not war brace up the flesh, the courage, the spirit of men; what is the value of peace?

Pacifistes, avez-vous vu votre paix?

L'homme finira-t-il comme un boutiquier retiré des affaires.

Si toute chose est enfin à sa place, il n'est plus besoin

de translation, le mouvement s'arrête, le drame finit.  
Je ne vois pas la paix.  
Que sera le monde sans le mal?  
Hélas, aplati au fond de la tranchée, sous mon sac et  
sous la douleur, il m'est arrivé de souhaiter votre néant,  
mais je n'ai pu m'en contenter.  
Il ne s'agit point du salut des hommes mais de garder  
le trésor de l'esprit.  
Votre idéal fut ma honte.  
Voici mon cri profond : j'ai peur de votre paix.  
Je ne vois pas. J'ai peur.  
Mais je veux bien vous jeter cet aveu.  
Cette guerre démocratique est morne et sa monotonie  
s'allonge comme une paix sans vergogne.

M. Drieu La Rochelle fears sloth, and praises danger as a whip to keep humanity awake and alert. He even asks whether the danger of the Great Peace is not a risk worth running :

Voici que j'ai prononcé des paroles dangereuses.  
N'ai-je pas renié l'idéal humain qui fut composé devant  
le feu primitif et qui est de ne pas souffrir.  
Mais je n'ai point confiance dans l'homme, il ne vaut  
rien sans sa souffrance.  
Si tu romps un des pôles contraires l'énergie s'enfuit de la pile.  
L'âme de l'homme si elle ne se roidit plus dans un  
défi, elle se cassera.  
Mais la Grande Paix n'est-ce pas le plus beau défi  
à la nature et pour l'homme un beau risque de mourir?

The men who come back from the war, taught by the cannon of the Germans how to live, fighting men who ceased to be an army as they won through on the battle-field, will tolerate no more stuffiness in life. The hated barracks must disappear, and, in their place, there must be tents in the open fields. The new soldier will be an athlete and a specialist in some mechanism :

Ainsi sera notre paix, bouleversée de fond en comble  
par l'énergique méditation de cette guerre.  
Guerre, révolution du sang, flux au cerveau, guerre,  
progrès, fatalité moderne,  
nettoisement et remise à neuf de notre maison,  
Notre maison ébranlée pour qu'elle ne choie,  
nous la rebâtissons totalement pierre à pierre avec le  
plus roide ciment armé et de grands trous pour la lumière.

There are no tears for the Cathedral of Reims. Leave them to the old men who made Sedan, and then tried to forget it. The young men will erect new buildings with a new beauty, if France will but remember they are there.

M. JULES ROMAINS, in his *Europe*, takes up an attitude diametrically opposed to that of M. Drieu La Rochelle. He sees the war as an irreparable and hopeless destruction of life and of scenes and places he has loved. He calls up images of these to his mind, and is not consoled by the thought that their disappearance may spur the young men on to create new beauty. On the contrary, these gone, many an incentive to live has gone with them :

Mais le plus fort souvenir  
Tombe, les mains en avant,  
Comme un jeune homme tué.

L'événement est sur nous.  
Il a le pas et le poil  
D'une bête quaternaire.

Sous ses plantes épatées  
Il écrase, pas à pas,  
Des choses qui ont notre amour ;

Le bourg de Dinant-sur-Meuse,  
La cathédrale de Reims,  
Et mainte raison de vivre.

Il a broyé pèsamment,  
Mis en morceaux, mis en poudre  
Certaines images du monde

Que des hommes trop mortels  
Portaient sous les os du front.

In his bitterness, he accuses himself and his fellows of having believed in too many things, the strophe of the poet, the chords of the musician, the torso of the sculptor, when the true servants of the universe were the miners and tunnellers, the artilleryman and the rifleman :

Pourtant j'écoute dans un arbre  
Un oiseau qui ne se tait pas ;  
Il y a, juste au pied de l'arbre,  
Beaucoup de tombes serrées.



Il les voit, sans doute; il les voit  
Toutes blanches entre les feuilles;  
Mais il chante le même chant  
Que sur une meule de blé.

But the images of the old Europe whose roads and rivers and railways he has travelled return to him, and in poem after poem he recalls some happy memory, some picture that has fixed itself on his mind. Was he not :

. . . le passant efficace  
Qu'un sol ne porte pas en vain,

the traveller born to appreciate :

. . . ce pays rassasié de temps,  
Où toute chose était si pleinement présente  
Que la possession débordait le désir?

Therefore, this cry :

Europe ! je n'accepte pas  
Que tu meures dans ce délire.  
Europe, je crie qui tu es  
Dans l'oreille de tes tueurs.

Europe ! Ils nous ferment la bouche;  
Mais la voix monte à travers tout  
Comme une plante brise-pierre.

Ils auront beau mener leur bruit;  
Je leur rappelle doucement  
Mille choses délicieuses.

Ils auront beau pousser leur crime;  
Je reste garant et gardien  
De deux ou trois choses divines.

But there are still corners of the earth where there are peace and liberty for one man. He has dreamed this evil world. Here in the south a few cypresses and a bird on a high branch, the sea and the blue sky, have renewed his voice :

La forme du coteau  
M'était prédestinée;  
La chaleur de ce jour  
Avait couvé pour moi.

Louange au nombre d'or  
Qui engendre ma vie  
Et qu'un dieu de jadis  
Trouva dans les étoiles !

Nevertheless, the anguish returns. The pressure of the towns on the crowds, the tired soldier whose only wish is to return to his cottage, the machine that carries him to his death with so much exactitude, the villages that are dying day by day at the front, the trains stuffed with men, the people in the towns who buy newspapers, hoping that the fresh print will have the odour of dead enemies, are too many proofs of the terrible god, who is battenning on Europe's most succulent flesh :

Europe ! Europe !

Je crie :

Ne te laisse pas mourrir !

Cramponne-toi. Crispe-toi.

Reprends ta vie dans un spasme.

Ecrase le dieu terrible !

M. Romains' poem is one of the few valid works of art incited by the war. At first, its compact form and firmness of treatment may put off those who are accustomed to find in halting rhythms and smothered rhymes their chief pleasure in poetry. But with each reading the impression grows ; there is in it such a richness of material, such a passion of humanity, that he will be a dull man indeed who does not finally place the book apart, to return to it again and again.

M. ANDRE SPIRE, who adds *Le Secret* to his other books of poems, *Versets* and *Vers les Routes absurdes*, would bring to the debate I have imagined his irony and his disillusionment. He might say nothing, thinking perhaps only of one of the landscapes he would have us believe he loves better than men. But it is not so, although he may find his peace there. Men hurt him with their follies and their crimes, and he teases them with a light bitterness, which, occasionally, when he is most stirred, breaks out into anger. If he were moved to speak, he would say in his own language much what M. Drieu La Rochelle has said in *A Vous, Allemands* :

Ainsi, tu vas l'avoir, ton rêve,

Ta Société des Nations !

Le loup et l'agneau brouteront ensemble.

Le lion, comme le boeuf, mangera de la paille,

Et un petit enfant les conduira.  
De nos épées nous forgerons des sous,  
Du fer de nos lances des serpes;  
Et l'on n'apprendra plus la guerre.

Et voilà !  
Il a fallu dix millions d'hommes,  
Dix millions d'hommes couchés à terre,  
Sanglants, percés, ouverts;  
Râlant, sans une goutte d'eau pour leur fièvre,  
Sans un baiser pour leurs lèvres.  
Il a fallu dix millions d'hommes  
Pour ce vieux rêve d'enfant,  
Cette chose si simple.

Produire et vendre,  
Acheter, et garder,  
Et donner, et rêver,  
Et écrire, et sculpter, et peindre  
Et laisser son voisin tranquille,  
C'était donc, hélas ! si difficile !  
Mais chaque fois qu'un peuple, après fortune faite,  
S'installait, et disait aux autres :  
" Maintenant, tout est bien ;  
Soyez doux, soyez justes,  
Respectez notre bien,"  
Un autre sentait ses muscles se durcir,  
Sa main devenir plus agile,  
Sa plume plus adroite,  
Son fer plus incisif,  
Et, à son tour, voyait le vieux souffle endormi  
Monter de terre,  
Tourbillonner son sable et sa chaleur,  
Et le prendre et lui dire :  
" Commande !  
Tu es le plus grand, le meilleur.  
Tu es le Soleil du monde.  
Les autres doivent se chauffer à ton feu.  
Et s'ils refusent  
Tu les brûles."

That is the human truth of it all ; it begins, as M. Spire shows in another poem, with the peasant who covets a corner of his neighbour's field with which to round off his own, with the striving after the luxury



and leisure of a large income; and it ends always with the weeping of mothers and their daughters. Perhaps there is no way out, and M. Spire is wise in seeking comfort in the fields, the woods, and the mountains, where he would be happy . . . if the problem of life and death would but leave him alone. A tender-hearted, clear-eyed poet.

The doctrine of MM. Jouve, Arcos, and Martinet is a simple one, and it is only partly true. When M. Arcos, in *Le Sang des Autres*, says:

Gonflés de haine à coups de pompe,  
Les peuples rompaient leurs amarres . . .

he overlooks the thousands of years of tribal warfare, the excitement of which works as an instinct in the masses of men. The appeal to this instinct has still power to set a nation to arms; the power may be decreasing in force, and the greater the number of men who, like MM. Jouve, Arcos, and Martinet, and our own "conscientious objectors," refuse to be moved by it, the better for the future of humanity—if universal peace is, indeed, a good, and not an evil; but the politicians, whom these poets loathe so much, can only stir the peoples to war in the measure of their instinct for fighting. How great this was in August, 1914, each one of us—with the exception of the intransigent few—has but to consult his own conscience. Once in, the one way out, apparently, is to smash through or to be smashed through.

It is typical of the attitude of these poets that the idea of death by the violence of men haunts them and tortures them. M. RENE ARCOS cannot find a sarcasm too bitter to express his hatred of slaughter . . . of men. He has a poem, in which he pictures three hundred sappers of the French engineers sawing and planing wood for crosses, a thousand for Champagne, a thousand for the Laonnais, a thousand for the Soissonnais, a thousand for Artois, others to load huge ships for Salonica, the Bosphorus, Africa, ten thousand to reafforest a denuded wood, two million to plant the disinherited land from the Alps to the Channel. On the battlefield of the Marne, he sees:

La plaine grasse où paît un grand troupeau de tombes.

M. P.-J. JOUVE has written a lengthy book of poems, *Danse des Morts*, through the pages of which Death dances at the elbow of everybody on earth, egging each one on to slaughter and still more slaughter. He has done it with so much vehemence that after a score or so of pages the mind refuses

to take in any more, refuses, in fact, to believe, with the result that M. Jouve defeats his own object. M. Martinet, again, has poems called *Sang des Morts*, *Cadavres*, *D'Autres Morts*, *Tous-saint-Trépassés*, and his book, *Les Temps Maudits*, is partly a lamentation for the dead, and partly a flagellation of the "authors of the crime."

The criminals are the same men for all three poets. You see them in the woodcuts by Frans Masereel, illustrating M. Arcos' book—not the least effective part of its lesson—plump, well-fed, silk-hatted gentlemen, bankers and politicians, cynically urging on the crowd to the slaughter in one picture, and as cynically saluting the dead in another :

O colère et viril anathème ! Que n'ai-je  
Vingt poings pour vous frapper,  
Vingt voix pour vous maudire,  
Hypocrites servants du drame !  
Vous qui l'avez voulu, vous qui l'avez cherché,  
Vous qui n'avez rien fait non plus pour l'empêcher,  
Vous qui attisez chaque jour  
De votre haleine empoisonnée  
Le feu par vos soins allumé.  
Je vous accuse nommément :  
Politiques et diplomates,  
Bonneteurs jouant à la passe  
Le sort des peuples sous la toile ;  
Vous tous : voleurs de territoires,  
Généraux et gens de finance,  
Clergés vendant votre silence,  
Hommes de plume et de mensonges,  
Policiers qui sentez l'égout,  
Vous tous : artisans de ce crime,  
Et vous encore, et vous aussi,  
Canaille des tréteaux qui en miment l'horreur  
Pour ceux qui de chez eux en reniflent l'odeur.

Bankers, again, in M. MARCEL MARTINET'S *Temps Maudits*, diplomats, statesmen, Government officials, the pillars of law and order, journalists, actors, professors, philosophers, musical comedians, and the high-souled friends of the people, the delegates at the international congresses :

Non, vous n'étiez point frères.

Dans vos congrès,  
Par petits groupes,  
Silencieux,  
Mais vous faisant signe de l'œil à la dérobée,  
En habits du dimanche,  
Indécis, l'âme empruntée,  
Mais l'air décidé, crâneurs, suffisants,  
Vous vous ameniez dans ces congrès  
Et vous serriez avec effusion les mains  
Des camarades étrangers  
Qui vous attendaient à la gare.

On visitait la ville . . .  
Déjà vous aviez remarqué :  
Celui-là, quelle gueule d'alboche !  
Et l'angliche, tu l'as vu, l'rasé ?  
Déjà vous aviez ricané :  
Non, pige-moi les ch'veux du russe !  
Déjà vous fait la moue :  
Hum ! ces franzoses, toujours les mêmes . . .

Vous observiez !  
At après des discours applaudis,  
Après, parfois,  
Un débat éclatant, dur et amer,  
Et montrant le fond trouble, étroit, glacé des cœurs,  
C'est alors, le soir du banquet final,  
Que vous vous mettiez à fraterniser,  
Et puis vous repartiez, chacun chez soi,  
Après vous être serré les mains.  
C'était ça.

C'était ça. Vous étiez rentrés, chacun chez soi ;  
Chacun faisait, à son assemblée générale,  
Un compte-rendu emphatique  
Où l'enthousiasme sonnait creux,  
Et, seul, dans le petit bureau du syndicat,  
Chacun souriait avec mépris  
Ou, rageant à froid, méditait des revanches,  
Songeant à ce voyage.

Où donc était votre âme ?

M. Jouve brings the same accusation in *Danse des Morts* :



Ceux-là,  
Entre tous les vendus, rénégats et complices,  
Ce sont les plus vendus et les plus bas.

Car ils dénonçaient dans leurs congrès,  
Une grande vérité.  
Car ils savaient la souffrance des esclaves.  
Car ils faisaient luire une grande promesse,  
Ceux-là.

Mais quels adroits compères  
A l'heure du danger !

M. Jouve's book, indeed, could be paraphrased into a violent pamphlet, which would contain the whole argument against war and the war of the writers who grouped themselves round M. Romain Roland in Switzerland. Its absolute truth would not matter; its relative truth would be measured by its action and the conviction it carried: that is, if mankind's attitude to it were to be, We are as you describe us, we always have been so, and we shall never wish to be different, the argument would be false, and the drift of a particular idiosyncrasy. Human truth is made by Yea or Nay. M. Arcos has a poem which describes the continual warfare among the inhabitants of a pool:

. . . . la lutte sans repos  
Entre les mille clans des eaux.

But he is not shocked, and he has no moral to draw:

C'est la guerre biologique  
Au temps propice du soleil  
Comme il y eut aux origines,  
Dans les ténèbres, la mêlée  
Qui fit le chaotique amas de ces rochers  
Si semblables aux cathédrales écroulées !

A being as much outside our life, and as capable of watching it, might make the same reflection with regard to us, and M. Arcos seems to have had this thought at the back of his mind, for, while M. Martinet and M. Jouve are nothing but humanitarian passion and pity for the victims of the war, both of them invoking the name and the teaching of Tolstoy, *Le Sang des Autres* betrays a double tendency: hatred of

the war, the stronger, and philosophic detachment. The last poem of the book has a passage in which it is said that the only drama is the Passion of the Universe :

Qu'un empire s'écroule, il restera la terre  
Toujours prête et parée dans ses mêmes frontières.  
Que la terre à son tour soit frappée dans sa course,  
Il restera l'espace et ses grappes de mondes,

and the last words of the book are :

Rien n'est perdu puisqu'il suffit  
Qu'un seul de nous dans la tourmente  
Reste pareil à ce qu'il fut  
Pour sauver tout l'espoir du monde.

M. Jouve has hammered out the theme of his horror and his pity in *Vous êtes des hommes* (1915), *Poème contre le grand crime* (1916), and *Danse des Morts* (1916-1917). The first book is written in the general terms of poetry ; in the second, which is akin in spirit to M. Duhamel's *Vie des Martyrs*, the pamphleteering violence of the third begins to appear. M. Jouve has published a fourth book since the Armistice, *Heures*, which reads like a work of convalescence, and ends with a hymn to Joy ; the bitterness has not gone, but life begins again :

Je déclare qu'il y a joie  
Malgré les hommes,  
Partout où le soleil d'été  
S'entasse à pleines journées  
Sur les fourmilières d'hommes ;  
Partout où le soleil des neiges  
Dans la rareté aérienne  
Ne peut atteindre à midi  
Un puits de glace fermée  
Qui médite sous la montagne.

Je déclare qu'il y a Joie  
Dans tous les ports d'athlètes,  
Puant la sueur, le goudron et la corde,  
Aux débardeurs multicolores  
Riches des vices de la terre,  
Protégés par un ciel de laine  
Sur les briques et les fumées ;  
Et qu'il y a la même Joie  
Dans les grands bois de l'hiver  
Quand sur les chenilles de boue  
Pâlit un vieux soleil . . . .

Mais je dis que la plus vraie Joie  
 Fille de notre misère,  
 O débile espèce des hommes,  
 La seule Joie de Dieu, vois-tu,  
 Est le vol aux ailes funèbres  
 De l'esprit frère du Feu.

Je dis qu'il demeure des Joies,  
 Mes droits et forts compagnons  
 Qu'ils n'ont pu mettre à mort !  
 Je dis que vous êtes sauveurs  
 Pour toute une île des hommes !  
 Je dis que nous formons au monde  
 Comme les veines d'un seul être  
 Baigné d'une seule grandeur !

Significant avowal : *Heures* is the only book published by M. Jouve since the outbreak of war, in which he acknowledges on the fly-leaf his former books of poems, *Présences* and *Parler*.

\* \* \*

EMILE VERHAEREN came to England on the last boat to leave Belgium after the outbreak of the war. The wanderings in exile he then began ended with his terrible death on the 27th November, 1916, under a railway carriage in Rouen Station. M. René Arcos—if the account given in *Le Mal* is M. Arcos' own adventure—met him one afternoon in Tottenham Court Road, and was saddened to hear him declare, "Moi qui ai prêché toute ma vie l'amour entre les hommes, la pitié, le pardon, je hais aujourd'hui de toutes les forces de mon être." But the war had shattered many of Verhaeren's dearest beliefs. He had left behind him in Belgium the corrected proofs of a book of poems, *Les Flammes hautes*, dedicated "à ceux qui aiment l'avenir," a book full of his confidence in the destinies of mankind; and his chief accusation against the Germans in the later book of poems, *Les Ailes rouges de la Guerre*, is that they killed the understanding which was growing up among men :

Car c'est ton crime immense, Allemagne,  
 D'avoir tué atrocement  
 L'idée  
 Que se faisait pendant la paix  
 En notre temps  
 L'homme de l'homme.



Verhaeren gave a reading at the Poetry Bookshop on the 4th February, 1915. The few rough notes I jotted down at the time may not be uninteresting :

Met Verhaeren at the Poetry Bookshop to-day. We talked about translating poetry while waiting for his audience. He agreed with me that the honestest way to translate a poem was to put it into prose. He cited Mardrus's *Mille et Une Nuits*. I told him about FitzGerald's Omar as an example of verse-translation with a new poem as the result. He thought that the poem was hardly one which could circulate freely in England, since it had passages that were as frank as parts of the Arabian Nights. He was surprised to hear that FitzGerald's version had in it nothing stronger than Epicureanism. Verhaeren said that he had been rather anxious about the translators of his own poems. As for the English translation—"c'est surtout cela qui est important, très important, n'est-ce pas?"—he was quite content that it should be in prose or in *prose rythmée*. He said that he had never translated a poem, and that he hardly knew a word of any language except his own. We had tea, which Verhaeren would not take: he had not acquired the habit. M—— divided his attention between the audience that was collecting downstairs and the room we occupied. In one of his upstairs spurts, we discussed ——, who had been arranging a lecture for Verhaeren. We told Verhaeren the story of ——'s lecture on the future of English poetry—mainly about his own particular brand, with a few snicks at the end at the young men who followed him. We explained that —— could not reconcile himself to the thought that he would one day be on the shelf, whereupon Verhaeren said that he was wrong, that this was a thing that all old stagers should face with equanimity, and that they should not be angry with young men for attacking them, "*puisque c'était la vie*," and it was right that they should do so. "For," he added with a laugh, "*remarquez bien*, if we are worth nothing, then it is well that we should be cleared out of the way; and if there is something valuable in us, then nothing the young men can do will destroy us." He admitted that when young he had attacked his elders; he might have changed his opinion of their value since then; but he regretted nothing.

Verhaeren is short and broad-shouldered, with a rather thin face and sharp nose, and long moustaches drooping over his mouth. He peers at you from behind rimless pince-nez. He wears his hair rather long, but the shape of his head allows him to do this without its giving him a shock-headed appearance. He had on a round soft felt hat, an overcoat, and that large woollen scarf which seems to be part of the Belgian national costume for winter. I asked V. whether he had seen that malicious poem by a Russian about him, purporting to convey his

astonishment at finding in Russia such emblems of civilisation as tramways, railways, and motor-buses. He had. He had also seen other Russian poems about him and caricatures of him, and for some reason he could not understand, they all spoke of him, and showed him as very thin. "Vous êtes pourtant," I said, "assez trapu." He agreed.

In the reading room Verhaeren read two poems from *Les Heures claires*, two from *Les Heures d'Après-midi*, the first and last poems of *Les Visages de la Vie* and *Pégase* from *Les Forces tumultueuses*. This last book, M—— had been forced to borrow from a lady who had just bought it in the shop, and, in cutting the leaves, Verhaeren said, "J'espère que cette dame ne va pas être fâchée parce que j'ai défloré son livre."—"Ah non," I replied, "... pourvu que vous en restiez là."—"Ah, ah!" he laughed. "Peut-être que je ne demanderais pas mieux si elle était là."

Verhaeren read in a clear strong voice, accentuating the rhythm, emotional, sincere. (After the reading, he told us that he thought that rhythm was muscular in its origin.) Before he read a poem, he explained it in its relationship to the book from which it was taken and to his life. This was exceedingly interesting, and excellent commentary on his work. He now and then read the wrong word; he confessed, on my suggesting it afterwards, that he had substituted the reading of another version. He has not the accent of Paris; gives more volume to his words; il a l'el mouillée.

After the reading, I conducted Verhaeren to his tube-station. He told me that he was very fond of quarters like Theobalds Road and Devonshire Street, where the people were thick. He said that he had studied the main arteries and streams of people of London, Paris, Brussels, and Berlin. He contrasted a Paris crowd issuing from a station with a Berlin crowd—the former falling into each and every gait, the latter mechanically falling into step in the most extraordinary way. As we went along the crowded street, Verhaeren often put his arm behind me in an affectionate way to pilot me through the crowd and to keep intact the little group he and I formed.

That is an imperfect picture of a great-hearted man and a great poet. At the age of fifty-nine, he was composing with the ardour of youth and the experience of years the poems of *Les Flammes hautes*, which are a confession of faith in the energies of men:

Mon cœur, je l'ai rempli du beau tumulte humain,  
Tout ce qui fut vivant et haletant sur terre,  
Folle audace, volonté sourde, ardeur austère  
Et la révolte d'hier et l'ordre de demain

N'ont point pour les juger refroidi ma pensée.  
 Sombres charbons, j'ai fait de vous un grand feu d'or  
 N'exaltant que sa flamme et son volant essor  
 Qui mêlaient leur splendeur à la vie angoissée.

Et vous, haines, vertus, vices, rages, désirs,  
 Je vous accueillis tous, avec tous vos contrastes,  
 Afin que fût plus long, plus complexe et plus vaste  
 Le merveilleux frisson qui m'a fait tressaillir.  
 Mon cœur à moi ne vit dument que s'il s'efforce;  
 L'humanité totale a besoin d'un tourment  
 Qui la travaille avec fureur, comme un ferment,  
 Pour élargir sa vie et soulever sa force.

One of the most moving poems in *Les Flammes hautes* is about the boring of a tunnel through a mountain; another is a vision of the world evoked by the ships at anchor in a port. He also loved wide spaces and the broad heavens overhead, with a magnificent sense of the four cardinal points, and forests and their gigantic battles with the storms, and flowers. Every expression of energy in life met with a corresponding response in his poetry; the titles of his books are suggestive enough of this; and in every one of these is a poem or two or three, in which he quietly contemplates his own intimate, inner life. Much as he hated the war, its display of forces could not but call from him the poems in *Les Ailes rouges de la Guerre*, which, more than any others, have captured the vibrations of the world's agony. It is probable that the ardour of his mind was the cause of his death, for the attempt to jump on the moving train at Rouen was the idea of a young man, to which perhaps the body did not respond quickly enough. On receiving the news of his death, some of us in England sent the following message to the *Mercure de France*:

*We, who were proud to be counted among his English friends, wish to express our grief at the tragic end of Emile Verhaeren. We admired his work; we knew the man; we loved him; and to us all his horrible and untimely death is a personal loss and a great sorrow.*

It is usual to contrast the poetry of Verhaeren with that of M. HENRI DE REGNIER: dynamic, the one; static, the other. The position of the two poets in their generation almost forces the comparison: Dionysus and Apollo. There is no abatement, there is only a devia-



tion, of energy in the poems of *Les Ailes rouges de la Guerre*. One feels, however, about the poems in M. Henri de Régnier's book, 1914-1916, that he would much rather have been with the soldiers than celebrating them :

Salut, héros ! Et toi qu'un autre destin penche  
A l'heure des combats sur cette feuille blanche,  
Est-ce ta faute, hélas ! d'avoir longtemps vécu  
Et d'être, lorsque l'an héroïque est venu,  
Parmi ceux dont les mains tristement désarmées  
Ne peuvent plus se joindre au geste des armées ?  
Résigne-toi. Du sol envahi des aïeux  
Se lèvent par milliers ses enfants glorieux.  
Ils viennent te venger, ô France, et te défendre !  
La terre où sont nos morts sera douce à leur cendre.  
Leur pas sonne comme le pas des conquérants.  
Admire-les. Salue au passage leurs rangs,  
Toi qui restes, mêlant ton âme avec leurs âmes.  
De ton ardeur éteinte, ils sont les jeunes flammes,  
Ceux-là qui vont mourir ou vaincre, avec orgueil !  
Il est trop tard. Demeure à présent sur le seuil.  
Mais au moins, que ta main sur cette page blanche  
Incrive les exploits de la grande revanche  
En écoutant le bruit de gloire, à l'horizon,  
Qui vient à nous avec la rumeur du canon,  
Et que ton sang réponde en ta veine vieillie  
A chaque battement du cœur de la Patrie !

M. de Régnier has not inscribed the exploits of the great *revanche*, and one is almost ready to applaud him for his discretion. Instead, he has clothed with the beauty of his own noble language the eternal commonplaces about death, courage, glory, revenge, the *patrie*, hatred of an ignoble enemy, and so on. These are sentiments that spring naturally to the lips of a thousand rhymesters when one's country is attacked; and our gratitude to M. de Régnier should be because he has put them into impeccable form and style, with due measure and no more, and has thus consummated the extinction of his less-gifted brethren.

M. JEAN DE BOSSCHERE is another Belgian poet—and artist (the word Belgian here is merely an indication of the territorial accident of birth), who fled from the German occupants of his country to England; but not until after he had lived some months with them in Brussels. He arrived in London with the manuscript, illustrated by himself, of

his observations of the invaders. The British censors would not pass the book, because the drawings were too realistic; the Belgians did not appear heroic and beautiful in them! Perhaps, too, the censors did not understand M. de Bosschère's realism. But the incident is illuminating. M. de Bosschère does not see humanity as heroic or beautiful. I shall say nothing here of his earlier books of poems, all illustrated by himself—*Béale-Gryne*, *Dolorine et les Ombres*, nor even of the *Métiers Divins*. In matter and manner they are, I imagine, part of M. de Bosschère's dead life; the third book is as yet but a partial statement, in transition to something simpler and finer. I will deal only with *La Porte fermée*, which was conceived, written, and published in London, and which is unique both in French poetry and in the series of M. de Bosschère's works. The poems in this book are in the French language; but they are, for the most part, of no country; they have a touch of the English spirit; there may be a strain of the Fleming in them; they are universal. Homère Mare is the simple man, who, tiring of his humble life, goes travelling, and loses his soul, which was in the pots and pans of his house, the flowers and the bee-hives of his garden. Ulysse is the hero who falls beneath the paws of the mob. Gridale is the martyr of his own idea. *L'Offre de Plebs* discusses friendship. *Doutes* is the cry of the unusual child on his discovery of the baseness and cowardice of humanity. *L'Homme de Quarante Ans* is the lament of middle-age at approaching death. Then there are the two exquisite meditations in a garden, *La Promesse du Merle* and *Verger*; an antiphony of maidenhood and spring, *Le Merle et la Jeune Fille*, with its cruel, capricious ending, and three studies of Greenwich: *In the College*, on the death of a little southern boy, *Tambours*, a meditation on death, interrupted by the drums of the Boy Scouts, "les petits enfants de l'école du meurtre," and *La Vieille*, who lies down in her black and jet on the grass of Greenwich Park beneath a sweltering sun. This list conveys nothing of the bite of M. de Bosschère's irony, when he is ironical; the depth of his sadness, when he is sad; the bitterness of his bitterness; the warmth and colour and harmony of his peace. He uses words as he uses black and white, in black overpowering masses of unexpected incidence, when the mood is dark; in light, rhythmic, significant lines, when the mood is happy or ironical; and there is not a word or a line that is not M. de Bosschère's own peculiar property, having behind it, and pressing upon it with the force of their volume, a vast store of visual memories. The poems in *La Porte fermée* are too long for me to quote any one of them in its entirety, and I hesitate to give short

extracts, which may show its manner, but which will reveal nothing of the integrity of the book. Perhaps this for its bitterness :

Il connaît la vérité sur les mères, enfin.  
Et le père et la mère se couchent au lit terrible de l'habitude !  
Le nu navrant des soirs,—les bottines qu'ils ôtent,—  
Le verre mis à sa place,—la montre sur le marbre,  
La misérable chemise,  
Les chiens qui aboient  
Avec les locomotives et les chats,  
Et voilà qu'il croit encore.

Et voilà qu'il croit encore,  
L'homme burlesque  
Qui s'est donné un univers  
Et un dieu comme un incendie immense  
Dont il sent la fumée ;  
Et certes ce n'est peut-être qu'un bûcher  
Fait avec les fanes de pommes de terre.

And the end of *Verger*, for its beauty :

Pourtant je suis seul dans ce verger  
Avec un pommier qui est comme une vierge  
Ouvrant sa robe, et qui montre un sein  
Blanc et tragique, un sein blanc d'ivoire sacré ;  
Une vierge qui dit dans un sourire ardent  
" Vois si je t'aime !"  
Et son cœur bat, je l'entends battre dans  
La passion de l'innocence . . . .

Et pourtant je suis seul dans ce verger.

It is unfortunate that *La Porte fermée* was published in England, and has thus been deprived of its natural circulation.

M. PAUL FORT, " le prince des poètes," has published so many books of poems since 1914, ten in all, that I have not space here to do anything more than indicate them. They are: *Les Nocturnes*, *Si Peau-d'Ane m'était conté*, *Deux Chaumières aux Pays de l'Yveline*, *Poèmes de France*, *Que j'ai de plaisir d'être Français*, *L'Alouette*, *La Lanterne de Priollet*, *Les Enchanteurs*, *Barbe-Bleue*, *Jeanne d'Arc et mes Amours*, *Chansons à la Gauloise*. A stupendous production, only approached, I believe, by a poet named Boyer d'Agen, an old symbolist, it seems, of whose work I am happily quite ignorant. M.



Fort's manner is too well known for me to add anything to its discussion. On the outbreak of the war, he began the publication of an eight-paged "bulletin lyrique de la guerre," which he called "*Poèmes de France*," and the poems in which are now collected together in the volume of "Ballades Françaises" under that name. In these poems, M. Fort scolds the Germans in a sprightly manner; they are the crowings of a Gallic cock who speaks a very pure and racy French.

The prolificacy of M. Fort springs from the sprightliness of a mind sensitive to every beauty and prettiness of the external world; the prolificacy of M. PAUL CLAUDEL from a deeper cause. He is just as sensitive to the beauties of nature; but the natural habit of his mind is to probe behind the external for the explanation of the mystery. At some period of his career, M. Claudel came under the influence of Rimbaud, who, he says, converted him to Christianity. Superficially, this would seem impossible; but the habit of M. Claudel's mind explains this mystery too. His Christianity narrowed itself down to the Roman Catholic doctrine, exclusive and all-containing. Henceforth his task has been to lift his mind from the natural objects of its contemplation, because

Celui qui dégage des choses temporelles ses sens et sa pensée peu à peu,  
Refait entre ses puissances l'unité et se met en présence de Dieu,

and from this continual travail to free his mind from temporal things in order to enter the presence of God flows the rich source of rhythm, imagery and music of the best of M. Claudel's later work. The intellectual process is complicated. You have a mind given to metaphysical speculation, at grips with the swarming variety and complexity of the universe, a mind which has accepted as a sufficient explanation a doctrine of uncompromising rigidity in its forms, but of extraordinary subtlety in its implications. It is as though a physicist were to make all his measurements with a foot rule, which he would declare to be at the same time a magic wand; and the object he was pursuing were not the measurements, but the magic, for, if he refused to believe in the magic, everything would stop:

Et bien que ce soit tellement beau, et que ce soit vrai, et que le Paradis

Soit autour de nous à cette heure même avec toutes ses forêts attentives comme un grand orchestre invisiblement qui adore et qui supplie,

Toute cette invention de l'Univers avec ses notes vertigineusement dans l'abîme une par une où le prodige de nos dimensions est écrit,

Cette préparation à travers tous les siècles du corps et du sang de Jésus-Christ,

Ce Dieu qui a réussi enfin à se faire homme et le Verbe à se faire entendre,

Ce cri d'entre les quatre membres écartelés qui jaillit, ce coeur sur la croix qui se brise dans un suprême effort pour se faire comprendre,

Tout cela pour nous, aux pieds de notre Néant, qui lui demande la permission d'exister,

S'arrêterait devant notre refus et notre mauvaise volonté.

All the difficulty of M. Claudel's work begins in this complicated mental process; and it would be an interesting intellectual exercise to take his poems, and to trace out the ramifications of his thought in them. Unfortunately, I have not the time, even if I had the space, the desire and the ability to do this. My present object is to discuss the poems M. Claudel has written during the war. The *Trois Poèmes de Guerre* are not so much the work of M. Claudel, the poet, as of M. Claudel, the French citizen. The first, *Tant que vous voudrez, mon Général*, is a homage to the bravery, steadfastness and devotion of the French troops, written with that *bonhomie* which M. Claudel can assume when he wishes, and which, when it takes the form of farces like *Protée* and *L'Ours et la Lune*, makes you regret their author's Catholicism. In the second, *Derrière Eux*, M. Claudel pretends that the innocent dead are assembling to form an impassable frontier behind the German lines. The last poem, *Aux Morts des Armées de la République*, is a call to the dead soldiers to take their share with the living in the victory.

In *Autres Poèmes durant la Guerre*, M. Claudel interweaves his patriotism into his principal preoccupation. The poems called *La Vierge à Midi*, *La Grande Attente*, *Ce n'est point de nous seulement* and *Si pourtant . . .* contain this curious argument. Just as we thirst for the precious blood of Jesus Christ, so it is possible that the Lord is also athirst, and that the blood shed for France may quench his thirst. But if the Lord has as great a need of our love as we have of his justice, then his thirst must be great. His silence is inexplicable; but the dead have given us a hold on him. He has taken so much from us; he cannot now do anything without us, since he is now not alone in giving. We have pledged all our belongings with him; we are on the sure side. But heavier than the burden to the tree of its fruit, to a mother of her dead sons, more formidable than his arm when it strikes, is his immobility and his silence. It is not we alone who are in question, it is he also. He can wish us no harm, for he is our

Father. If he were only God, there could be no understanding possible between us; but since he has died on the Cross for us, he must love us as a father, and, if it is true that, when they suffer, we are not very different from those we love: have pity on us, Lord, because of yourself! The Victory will come, but if only it were for to-morrow:

Seigneur, ah! ne tardez pas, mettez-vous à la portée de vos amis!  
Jamais nous ne saurons plus vous remercier, comme nous en sommes capables aujourd'hui!

There is no question that, doctrine apart or not, *La Grande Attente* is a magnificent poem, impressive both in march and diction. *Rome* and *A l'Italie* are two other fine poems. But the argument which I have set out crudely is not the only one that could be drawn from this book. By searching M. Claudel's poems, you would finally, if you had vision enough, reach down to his brooding mind, and make your own discoveries in the regions in which it moves.

*La Messe Là-Bas*, from which the first two quotations in these remarks are taken, is given up almost entirely to M. Claudel's meditations on the mysteries of the Catholic doctrine. The book was written in Rio de Janeiro, whither its author had been sent by the French Government as the representative of France, and this circumstance adds a human touch and pathos to the poems:

Une fois de plus l'exil, l'âme toute seule une fois de plus qui remonte  
à son château,  
Et le premier rayon du soleil sur la corne du Corcovado!

Tant de pays derrière moi commencés sans que jamais aucune demeure  
s'y achève!  
Mon mariage est en deçà de la mer, une femme et ces enfants que j'ai  
eus en rêve.

Tous ces yeux où j'ai lu un instant qu'ils me connaissaient, tous ces  
gens comme s'ils étaient vivants que j'ai fréquentés,  
Tout cela est pareil une fois de plus à ces choses qui n'ont jamais été.

Ici je n'ai plus comme compagnie que cette augmentation de la  
lumière,  
La montagne qui fait un fond noir éternel et ces palmiers dessinés  
comme sur du verre.

Et quand la Création après le jour sans heures se condense une fois  
de plus du néant,  
Fidèle à l'immense quai chaque soir, je vais revisiter l'Océan:



La mer et ce grand campement tout autour avec un million de feux  
qui s'allument,

L'Amerique avec toutes ses montagnes dans le vent du soir comme des  
Nymphes couronnées de plumes !

L'Océan qui arrive par cette porte là-bas et qui tape contre la berge  
haute,

Sous le ciel chargé de pluie de toutes parts ces chandelles de cinquantes  
pieds qui sautent !

Mon esprit n'a pas plus de repos que la mer, c'est la même douleur  
démence !

La même grande tache de soleil au milieu sans rien ! et cette voix qui  
raconte et qui se lamente !

But the melancholy of exile leads M. Claudel into the church :

La cloche sonne. Le prêtre est là. La vie est loin. C'est la messe.

*" J'entrerai à l'autel de Dieu, vers le Dieu qui réjouit ma jeunesse."*

And the things he sees and the things he remembers only serve to  
bring him to the Cross and the service of the Mass. It is very sad to  
feel alien to so much magnificence.

# LIST OF BOOKS

Author.	Title.	Publisher.
Guillaume Apollinaire	Calligrammes	Paris : Mercure de France
Jean Cocteau	Le Cap de Bonne Espérance	Paris : Editions de la Sirène
René Kerdyk	Les Oiseaux tristes	ditto
Paul Eluard	Le Devoir et l'Inquiétude	Paris : chez Gonon.
Henri Ghéon	Foi en la France	Paris : Nouvelle Revue Française.
Paul Aeschmann	Le Coureur d'Azur	Paris : Georges Crès
François Porché	L'Arrêt sur la Marne	Paris : Nouv. Rev. Fran.
	Le Poème de la Tranchée	ditto
Pierre Drieu La Rochelle	Interrogation	ditto
Jules Romains	Europe	ditto
André Spire	Le Secret	ditto
René Arcos	Le Sang des Autres	Geneva : Editions du Sablier
Pierre-Jean Jouve	Vous êtes des Hommes	Paris : Nouv. Rev. Fran.
	Poème contre le grand Crime	Geneva : Editions " Demain "
	Danse des Morts	La Chaux de Fonds : Edition d'Action Sociale
Marcel Martinet	Heures	Geneva : Editions du Sablier
Emile Verhaeren	Les Temps maudits	Geneva : Editions " Demain "
	Les Flammes hautes	Paris : Mercure de France
	Les Ailes Rouges de la Guerre	ditto
Henri de Régnier	1914-1916	ditto
Jean de Bosschère	{ La Porte fermée The Closed Door	London : John Lane
Paul Fort	Poèmes de France	Paris : Payot
Paul Claudel	Trois Poèmes de Guerre	Paris : Nouv. Rev. Fran.
	Autres Poèmes durant la Guerre	ditto
	La Messe Là-bas.	ditto

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